Purification of the Soul: An Explanation from Shaykh Ali at-Timimi

Compiled by Nuraddin El Amin.

بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا صَلَّيْتَ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَعَلَى آلِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ ، اللَّهُمَّ بَارِكْ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا بَارَكْتَ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَعَلَى آلِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَةُ اللهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ

All praise is due to God, Lord of all the worlds.

The Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful, Master of the Day of Judgment.

The One who sends down the Book and the Balance so that mankind may establish justice.
We praise Him, seek His aid, and ask for His forgiveness.

We seek refuge in God from the evils of our own souls and the consequences of our deeds.

Whomsoever God guides, none can misguide, and whomsoever God misguides, none can guide.

I bear witness that there is no god but God, alone, without any partners—the King, the Truth, the Manifest—and I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger; The Seal of Prophets.

DISCLAIMER:

NONE OF THIS IS MY ORIGINAL WORK; I HAVE WRITTEN THIS ESSAY ENTIRELY BASED ON THE NOTES I COMPILED WHILE LISTENING TO "Purification Of The Soul" BY SHAYKH ALI AT-TIMIMI.

YOU CAN FIND HIS WORK HERE: https://www.kalamullah.com/ali-timimi.html

Introduction: The Imperative of Tazkiyah.

The purification of the soul *(Tazkiyah al-Nafs)* stands as the cornerstone of Islamic spirituality, representing the quintessential objective of worship *(Ibadah)*. It is a transformative journey that transcends mere ritualistic adherence, demanding a profound internal reckoning with one's relationship to Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala. Without this purification, the believer cannot hope to enter Paradise except through the refining fires of Hell, as the Prophet (ﷺ) has warned.

This short essay seeks to elucidate the theological, spiritual, and practical dimensions of *Tazkiyah*, drawing upon the teachings of ***Shaykh Ali at-Timimi*** and the enduring wisdom of the Quran and *Sunnah*.

At its core, *Tazkiyah* is not merely an act of cleansing but a continuous process of spiritual elevation, rooted in the divine commandments and the Prophetic tradition. The Prophet (ﷺ) succinctly defined it as the awareness that Allah is with him wherever he is—a state of consciousness that forms the bedrock of a purified soul. This awareness fosters an unbreakable bond with the Divine, ensuring that every action, intention, and thought is aligned with the pleasure of Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala.

The Theological Foundations of Tazkiyah.

Linguistic and Scriptural Roots

The term *Tazkiyah* shares its linguistic origin with *Zakat*, denoting growth, increase, praise, and purification. In a *Shari'* context, it signifies the process of cleansing the soul from the spiritual blockages that obstruct its ascent to Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala. This purification is not a self-generated endeavor but a divine blessing *(Hidayah)*, attainable only through strict adherence to the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (ﷺ).

The Quran repeatedly emphasizes the importance of purification before the acquisition of knowledge. Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala declares: **He has succeeded who has purified himself.** *(Surah Al-A'la, 87:14)*. This divine prioritization underscores the necessity of *Tazkiyah* as a precursor to all forms of spiritual and intellectual growth. Scholars, therefore, stress the cultivation of noble character *(Akhlaq)* as a prerequisite to the pursuit of sacred knowledge *(Ilm)*, for knowledge without purification risks becoming a source of arrogance rather than enlightenment.

Divine Oaths and the Emphasis on Purification

Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala employs oaths in the Quran to draw attention to matters of profound significance. The following divine oaths are intrinsically linked to the purification of the soul:

1) *The Sun and its radiant light*
2) *The Moon as it follows its course*
3) *The Day as it reveals the Sun*
4) *The Night as it conceals the Sun*
5) *The Heaven and He Who constructed it*
6) *The Earth and He Who spread it forth*
7) *The Soul and He Who perfected it*
8) *Time itself*

Each of these oaths serves as a divine testament to the critical importance of *Tazkiyah*. They collectively affirm that the success of those who purify their souls is a central theme in the Quran, reinforcing the notion that spiritual purification is the pathway to divine acceptance and ultimate success in both this world and the Hereafter.

The Journey to Purification: Theoretical and Practical Dimensions.

Tawheed as the Foundation

The oneness of Allah *(Tawheed)* is the bedrock upon which *Tazkiyah* is built. It precedes even the five pillars of Islam, for without a firm belief in the absolute unity of Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala, all acts of worship risk being tainted by *shirk* (polytheism). The Prophet (ﷺ) emphasized that *Tazkiyah* is a divine favor, one that must be sought through sincere supplication and unwavering adherence to the *Sunnah*.

The abandonment of sin, particularly those transgressions explicitly labeled as filth *(rijs)* in the Quran, is a critical step toward purification. Major sins and evil deeds corrupt the soul, and their abandonment is essential for its rectification.

Ikhlas: The Foundation of Worship

Sincerity *(Ikhlas)* is the purification of the heart from all forms of ostentation and self-deception. It is the act of dedicating all worship and obedience exclusively to Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala, free from the desire for worldly recognition or praise.

Ikhlas is nullified by:

- **Riyyah:** *Showing off acts of worship to gain admiration.*
- **Sum'ah:** *Performing deeds to be heard and praised by others.*
- **Ujb:** *Self-admiration and arrogance.*
- **Hubb al-Dunya:** *Excessive love for the worldly life.*

The first two are particularly **poisonous**, as they represent diseases of the heart that distort the very essence of worship. **True *Ikhlas*** ensures that all acts of devotion are performed **solely for the pleasure of Allah** Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala, untainted by the motivations of the creation.

The Disease of Riyyah: Diagnosis and Remedy.

The Nature of Riyyah

Riyyah (ostentation) is a subtle and insidious spiritual ailment that can manifest at three critical junctures:

1) **Before the Act:** *If one detects an impure intention prior to performing a deed, it is incumbent upon them to rectify their intention before proceeding.*
2) **During the Act:** *Should Riyyah arise while performing the act, one must immediately reject it and persist with sincerity.*
3) **After the Act:** *Even if the deed was initially sincere, boasting about it afterward can nullify its reward.*

Eleven Remedies for Riyyah

The cure for *Riyyah* lies in a combination of spiritual awareness, divine remembrance, and practical discipline. The following methods offer a comprehensive approach to purifying the heart:

- *Recognizing One's Status as a Slave of Allah*
- *Acknowledging Divine Guidance, Humility in Worship*
- *The Command to Rectify the Heart*
- *Fear of Divine Punishment, Secrecy in Worship*
- *Remembrance of Death*
- *Understanding the Nature of Riyyah*
- *Recognizing the Limitations of Creation*
- *Disregarding the Presence of Others in Worship*
- *Seeking Refuge from Shirk.*

The Prophet (ﷺ) taught the following supplication as a **protection against *Riyyah* and *shirk***:

Allahumma inni a'udhu bika an ushrika bika wa ana a'lam, wa astaghfiruka lima la a'lam.
(O Allah, I seek refuge in You from knowingly associating partners with You, and I seek Your forgiveness for what I do not know.)

The Equilibrium of Worship and Tawakkul.

The Dual Pillars of Faith

Islam is structured upon two complementary halves:

1) **'Ibadah**: *The epitome of love and submission to Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala.*
2) **Tawakkul**: *Complete reliance on Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala in all affairs.*

Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal described *Tawakkul* as an action of the heart, one that cannot exist without a thorough understanding of cause and effect.

The Four Categories of Humanity

Humanity can be categorized into four groups based on their relationship with the aforementioned pillars of faith:

1) **Those Who Possess Both Worship and Tawakkul:** *The state of the true believer, embodying the perfection of faith.*
2) **Those Who Possess Neither:** *The most misguided, devoid of any sense of sanity.*
3) **Those Who Worship but Lack Tawakkul:** *Their faith is fake, as they fail to place full trust in Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala.*
4) **Those Who Possess Tawakkul but Do Not Worship:** *Their faith is superficial, as they neglect the practical dimensions of devotion.*

Practical Steps and Supplications for Purification.

Prescribed Supplications

The Prophet (ﷺ) provided specific supplications to aid in the purification of the soul, this example was instructed to be mentioned after the Prayer:

Allahumma a'inni 'ala dhikrika, wa shukrika, wa husni 'ibadatika.
(O Allah, help me to remember You, to give thanks to You, and to worship You in the best manner.)

Ibn Taymiyyah stated that the most excellent supplication is to ask Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala for His pleasure.

Contemplation and Humility

To attain purification, the believer must engage in constant contemplation and self-scrutiny. The following 3 are practices mentioned by **Shaykh Ali at-Timimi:**

Contemplation of the Creator: *Focus on understanding and remembering Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala to the extent that the creation is forgotten in its entirety.*

Recognition of Divine Blessings: *Acknowledge Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala's favors to remind oneself of his worthlessness as an individual except by Allah's grace.*

Scrutiny of One's Opinions: *Avoid satisfaction with yourself without concrete evidence, as contentment without proof leads to pride, arrogance, and misguidance.*

Conclusion: The Ultimate Aspiration

The **purification** of the soul is a **lifelong endeavor**, demanding perpetual **self-examination**, **sincerity**, and **reliance** on Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala.
It is a divine blessing that must be sought through the *Sunnah*, with the ultimate aim of attaining Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala's pleasure and Paradise.

As believers, **we must** continuously **strive** to **purify** our **hearts**, **intentions**, and **actions**, ever mindful of the Quranic declaration:
Iyyak na'budu wa iyyaka nasta'in *(You alone we worship, and You alone we ask for help)*.

This verse encapsulates the essence of Islam—the harmony of worship and Tawakkul.
May Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala grant us the ability to purify our souls and achieve His pleasure. Ameen.

COMPILED BY NURADDIN EL AMIN FROM SHAYKH ALI AT TIMIMI'S AUDIO SERIES:
"Purification of the soul" ON WWW.KALAMULLAH.COM